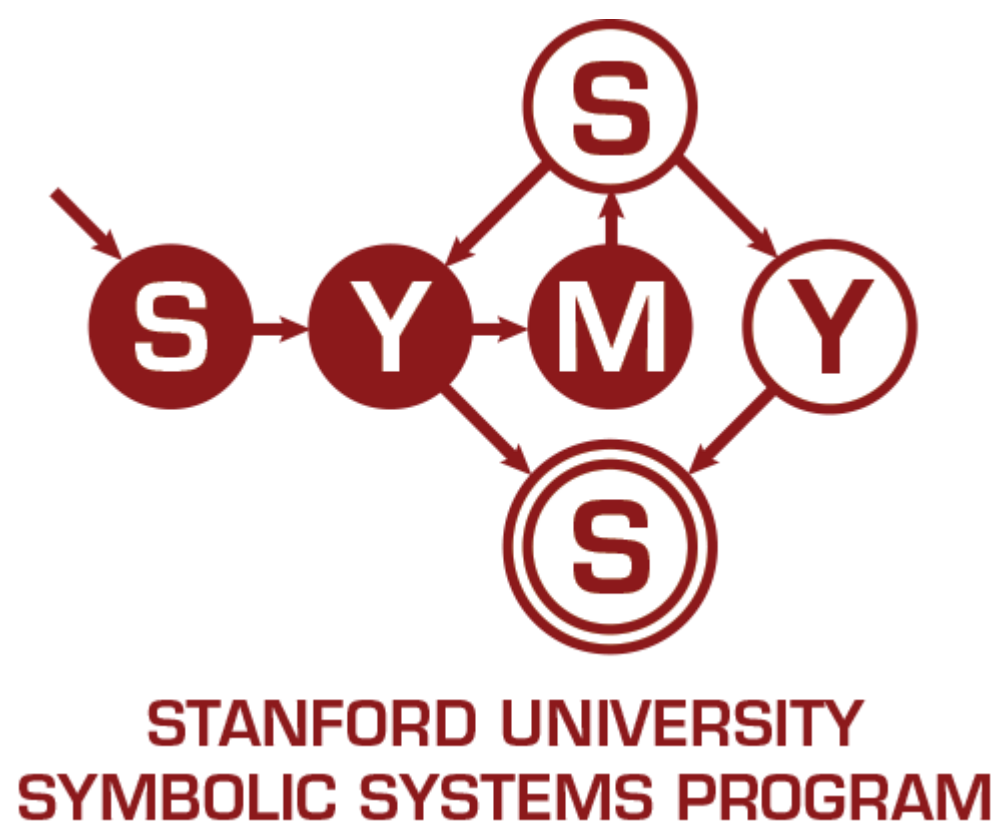


Psychological predictors of stated and displayed preferences in online dating

Mira Nencheva, Brian Knutson

Department of Psychology | Stanford University



Introduction

Background:

- Smiling increases positive affect for target¹
- Looking at the effects of smiling on choice in online dating without controlling for attractiveness might lead to falsely finding no effect²
- Previous studies report discrepancies between stated and displayed preferences, with higher accuracy for physical traits²



Central Research Questions:

- Does smiling in the profile photo increase the number of contacts a female user receives in online dating?
- Are the effects of smiling and attractiveness independent?
- How accurately do stated preferences for happiness and attractiveness reflect displayed preferences?

Importance:

- Most dating websites currently use a match-finding algorithm that relies on stated preferences and does not take into account the effect of smiling on the choice to contact a partner

Methods

- 36 college-aged females: 2 photos each (smiling and neutral)



Note: example from Minear, M. & Park, D.C.(2004)

- Each photo was rated by 50 heterosexual college aged males (18-28) on attractiveness and happiness (7-point scale)
- A different group of 50 heterosexual college-aged males indicated:
 - interest in contacting each female (1 photo/female)
 - importance of happiness and attractiveness (as judged by photo)
- Displayed preferences estimates: linear regression coefficients for attractiveness and smiling when predicting interest in contacting female

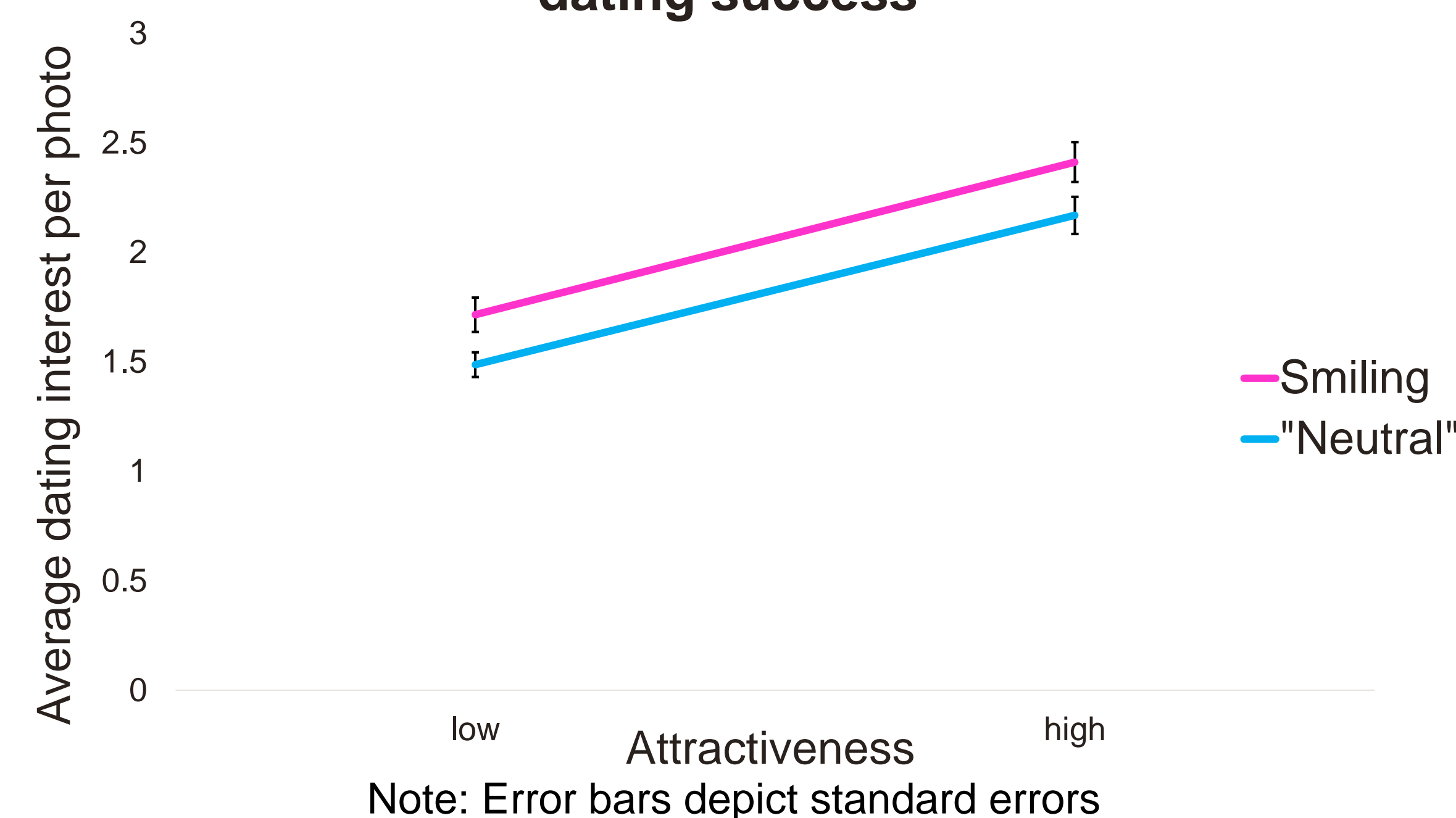
Results

Smiling and attractiveness: two main effects

- Smiling and attractiveness independently increased the dating success of a female (across subjects)
- Attractiveness had a larger effect on dating interest than smiling (on average 12.5% increase in number of contacts for high vs. low attractiveness vs. 5.6 % for smiling vs neutral)

ANOVA		
Cases	F	p
Smiling	8.806	0.004
Attractiveness (median split)	75.402	< .001
Interaction	0.009	0.923

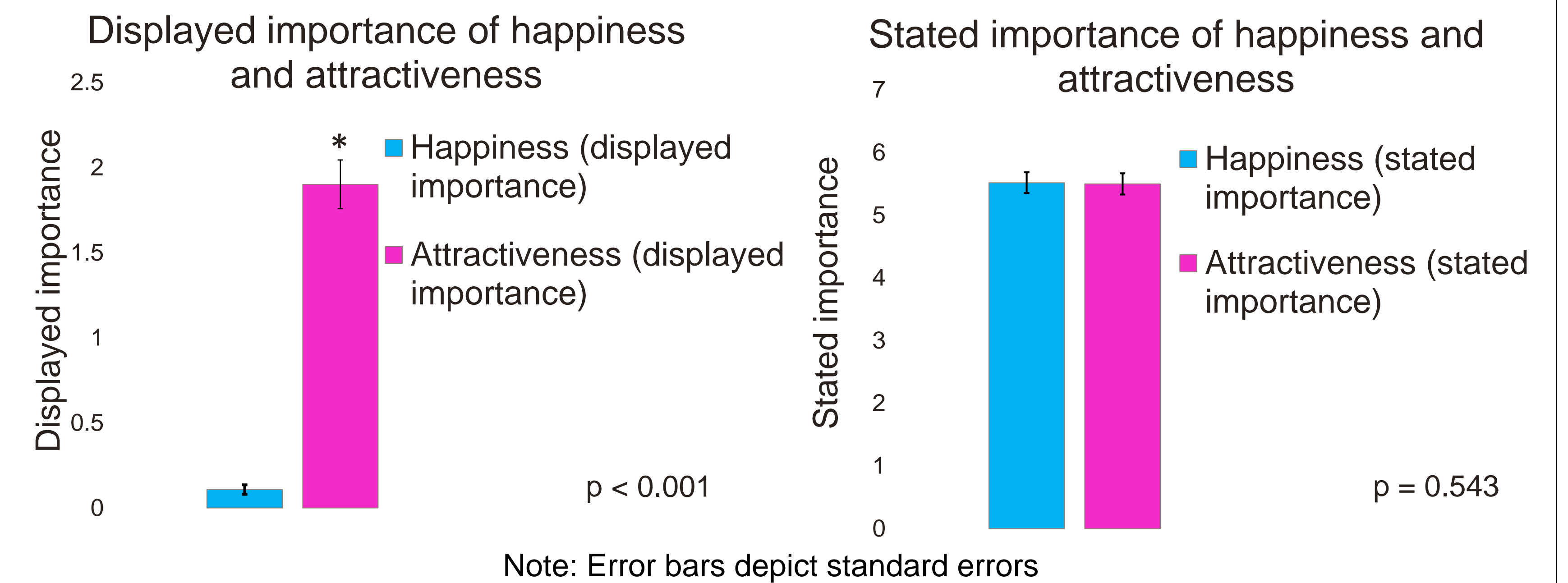
Smiling, attractiveness and dating success



Results (Continued)

Stated importance of happiness and attractiveness does not reflect displayed preferences

- Displayed importance of attractiveness was significantly larger than that of happiness (Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test)
- No significant difference between the stated importance of attractiveness and happiness
- Only for 34.6 % of participants the relative importance of attractiveness and happiness had the same direction for stated and displayed preferences



Conclusion

- Females received more contacts when smiling
- Smiling and attractiveness independently increased the dating success of females
- Participants' stated preferences are not an accurate measure of their displayed preferences for smiling and attractiveness

Future Directions

- Finding neural predictors of displayed preferences and contact-or-not choices
- Exploring effects of gender, race, culture and sexual orientation on preferences

References

- Photo source: . Minear, M. & Park, D.C.(2004). A lifespan database of adult facial stimuli. Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers. 36, 630-633
- ¹Lau, S. (1982). The effect of smiling on person perception. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 117(1), 63-67.
- ²Wood, D., & Brumbaugh, C. C. (2009). Using revealed mate preferences to evaluate market force and differential preference explanations for mate selection. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 96(6), 1226.